

## **Medication Dispensing in Emergency Departments The Licensed Nurse's Role**

The Boards of Nursing, Medicine, Pharmacy, and legal counsel recently worked together to arrive at consistent expectations regarding medication dispensing in emergency departments when a pharmacist is not on duty or readily available (within a 10-mile radius). The resulting document, a memorandum of understanding, has been distributed to the boards' various interested parties lists. This article serves to provide a summary of that document.

The ability for licensed nurses (RNs and LPNs) to issue take-home medications to patients upon the order of a licensed prescriber (APRN with Prescriptive Authority or person authorized by the Board of Medical Examiners to prescribe) has traditionally been a gray area in pharmacy and nursing statutes and rules in Montana.

All three boards agree that no violation of rule or statute occurs when a licensed prescriber gives a licensed nurse an order to issue pre-packaged, properly labeled medications to an ER patient for home use under such circumstances. Practitioners with prescriptive authority are permitted to dispense drugs in an emergency setting, and may package and label medications for a licensed nurse to hand to a patient. The nurse must not be the person who packages and labels the drug for the patient.

While it is typically in the patient's best interest to begin medications at the time of the ER visit, many acute care facilities in Montana do not have nighttime and/or weekend pharmacy coverage. Pharmacists responsible for medication provision in such facilities should develop a list of potential take-home medications in collaboration with their P&T committee, hospital administration, and staff/ER physicians. Quantities and labeling should be agreed upon, and the pharmacist should pre-package the specific medications for potential emergency use. Medications should be properly labeled in moisture and light resistant childproof containers with expiration date noted. Antibiotics to be reconstituted can be packaged together with a labeled bottle containing the correct amount of water and instructions for reconstitution.

Note that proper labeling includes:

- ◆ the name, address and phone number of the pharmacy or institution providing the medication
- ◆ the name of the prescriber, the patient's name and the date (these may be added at the time of issuance)
- ◆ complete patient directions
- ◆ name, strength and quantity of the drug
- ◆ any applicable auxiliary labels

The packaging pharmacist would be well advised to include a counseling sheet with each medication packaged. ER staff should extend an offer of counseling by either the prescriber or the pharmacist and document such counseling.

The memorandum of understanding is available upon request from any one of the three boards. To contact the Board of Nursing, please call (406) 841-2341. A copy of the memorandum can be faxed or mailed to you.